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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

No 66 Dec. 2002

08 JAN 2003

Puffins return to Ailsa Craig

In summer 2002 Puffins bred successfully on Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde for the first time in decades.

The sad story of the decline of the once numerous Puffin on Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde is well documented. In Victorian times they bred in huge numbers. When birds took to the wing, Robert Gray in *Birds of the West of Scotland* (1871), described them in classic terms: "*...their numbers seemed so great as to cause a bewildering darkness*". However, in a few short decades that soon changed. J.M. Campbell, in the *Annals of Scottish Natural History* in 1892, had first recorded the presence of rats on the island in 1889, probably transported there by a cargo vessel delivering supplies to the recently built lighthouse or from a shipwreck. Either way, it was only a few years later that their effect on the Puffins was evident: "*The eggs and young of the sea-fowl also paid large tribute to the omnivorous rodent, so much so, that fewer young, I believe, were reared than has ever been the case before.*" In the last three months of 1890, the light-keepers killed over 900 rats reporting that "*They are all over the island, from the very top down to the water's edge.*" Getting rid of rats on an island such as Ailsa appeared a daunting, if not impossible, prospect. Campbell concluded that "*It is difficult, if not impossible, to suggest a cure but if any such can be found there is no more favourable spot on which to operate, for the Craig...cannot, unless by a chance similar to their introduction...receive any outside accession to their numbers.*"

In the 1920s the situation was still causing such concern that the Glasgow branch of the then embryonic RSPB took action and launched what was probably the first ever rat-eradication attempt, purely to save the birds, on any island anywhere in the world. Despite gallant efforts to control rats, poisons used then were not wholly lethal and rats were soon on the increase and again causing problems to wildlife. This situation remained until 1991. By the early 1930s the same Puffin colony had once more been so ravaged by rats that J.M. McWilliam in his *Birds of the Firth of Clyde* (1936), described Puffins as "*...practically extinct*". McWilliam also printed in his book a picture by pioneer bird photographer Charles Kirk, portraying a group of Puffins loafing on a rock on Ailsa in 1906, with the account in the text stating "*It is possible that Puffins may never be photographed here again.*"

Puffins on Ailsa Craig. (Bernie Zonfrillo)

Superficially, Ailsa seemed to be a typically bustling, prospering seabird colony with an ever-increasing Gannet population. However, Gannets are big, strong birds, well able to take care of any possible threat from rats. They also always attend the young from hatching to fledging. Studies of other species told a different story. Gull fledging success was very poor, Fulmar chicks were attacked and eaten on the ledges as their parents temporarily left them to forage at sea, and Eider eggs vanished overnight from well-hidden nests. Other indigenous species on the island, such as Slow Worms, Common Lizards and Pygmy Shrews, were still present, but in smaller numbers than the old accounts would have us believe.

In 1990 the island's owner, the Marquess of Ailsa, financed a pilot study by Glasgow University Applied Ornithology Unit that was able to prove that by eliminating rats from a restricted area, it was possible to change from complete breeding failure of cliff-nesting Fulmars to 100% breeding success in one season.

To scale up the operation, all that was now needed was money to purchase bait and an enthusiastic team of hard-working volunteers to set previous wrongs right! Donations were therefore sought from various conservation organisations and the response was good with some, such as SOC and RSPB, giving willingly while others thought it would never work and didn't see the point in trying! SNH then matched the amount of cash raised, and by January 1991 all was in place to set the full-scale rat eradication project in motion. With five tonnes of Warfarin on the island, the labour-intensive distribution of bait began. Backaches were greatly reduced when the Royal Navy Air Squadron at, appropriately, HMS *Gannet*, Prestwick, heard of the plans and suggested use of a Sea King helicopter for bulk airlift of bait to the upper parts of the island. The pilots got some useful training out of the exercise and we got the bait to the areas most difficult to reach. One of our basic problems of getting three tonnes of bait up a very steep 1,114 ft mountain was then expertly solved in the course of a few hours!

With the bait distributed and monitoring set up, it was soon pretty clear that over most of the island the rats had been eliminated. In time, detailed monitoring, using hundreds of chewsticks (margarine-saturated wooden spatulas, loved by hungry rats) revealed no rat activity

A Sea King from HMS Gannet *delivers rat poison to the island. (Bernie Zonfrillo)*

anywhere on the island. Before baiting commenced, rats had tackled all chewsticks set out within a few days. Now they told a different story.

A smaller back-up baiting was carried out the following winter to ensure that not one rat remained and monitoring by use of chewsticks continued for a few years more. Tribute must here be paid to all those who helped in the project – especially the bait distributors who worked in some pretty bad wintry weather conditions from dawn to dusk. Eradication projects are highly labour-intensive.

Monitoring of chewsticks, bird carcasses and seabird breeding success continued for four years in total and all the evidence reinforced the fact that rats had been completely eliminated. Since no wild rat lives more than four years it was evident there was to be no unexpected resurgence. I was certain that not one rat remained. Rabbit numbers were also reduced but many survived, partly through the fact that rats dominate the bait when feeding and "see off" hungry rabbits. However rabbits have since increased once more.

The main aim of the exercise was to once again reinstate the Puffin as a breeding species on Ailsa Craig and this was proving painfully slow. Other birds quickly took advantage of the rat-free surroundings. Shelduck bred, Black Guillemots – a rat-sensitive species - nested in increasing numbers, Wheatears bred, Oystercatchers increased from one to three pairs, Shags colonised the boulder beaches and Razorbills also bred at lower levels. A pair of Ringed Plovers (with only two previous individual records for the island) arrived and bred and indigenous Slow Worms, lizards and Pygmy Shrews all prospered.

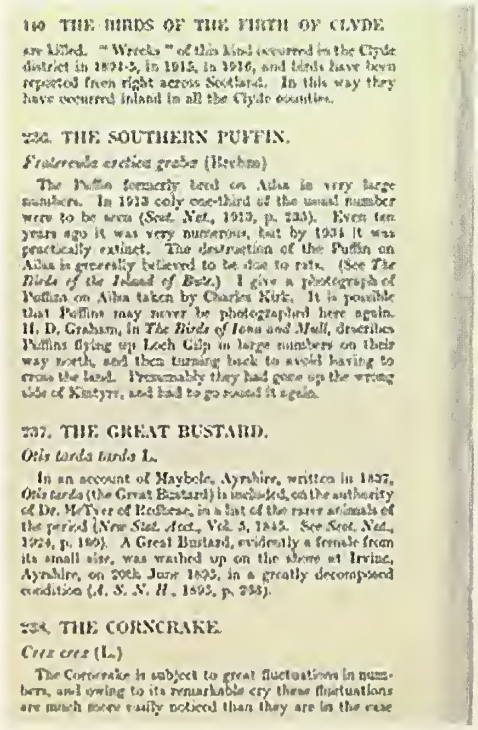
Puffins had always been around Ailsa, sometimes in small groups, but never more than singles ashore and usually in high cliffy situations. No young were ever seen, no prospectors ever observed in the same place twice and no individuals were ever observed carrying fish. No doubt the teeming rat population that covered the island had ensured none would ever breed successfully. Former estimates of Puffin numbers nesting on Ailsa Craig since the 1900s were guesswork only, and an erroneous assumption that birds present were in fact breeding. Now with rat-free conditions surely the island would be ideal for birds to nest upon if they could just make the psychological "leap" from sea to shore "en masse"?

Hopes rose during August 2001 when two Puffins flew out from among the prospecting and nesting Razorbills. The area was left undisturbed. At long last, and as the previous year's activity suggested, seven Puffins plucked up enough courage to come ashore as a group on 4th July 2002. Possibly they had been ashore before then, perhaps at night, but while active in the same area I saw none ashore during daylight hours in June of that year. Thereafter, Puffin numbers ashore peaked at 21 individuals and by early August two of these birds were observed carrying fish to feed young. Breeding was at last proven and I was also able to once again photograph Puffins in a group on Ailsa Craig, a mere 96 years after Charles Kirk!

Hopefully the Ailsa Craig Puffin colony will, with time, thrive and prosper once more, to again become a spectacular sight rivalling that described by William Abercrummie in 1696 who declared that Ailsa Puffins *"when put upon the wing, they will darken the heavens above the spectator".* I look forward to that day.

Bernie Zonfrillo

Visitors planning a trip to Ailsa Craig should contact the boatman, Mr Mark McCrindle, Girvan, at 01465 713219.



140 THE BIRDS OF THE FIRTH OF CLYDE

are killed. "Wrecks" of this kind occurred in the Clyde district in 1891-2, in 1915, in 1916, and birds have been reported from right across Scotland. In this way they have occurred inland in all the Clyde counties.

232. THE SOUTHERN PUFFIN.

Fratercula arctica grabæ (Brehm)

The Puffin formerly bred on Ailsa in very large numbers. In 1913 only one-third of the usual number were to be seen (*Scot. Nat.*, 1913, p. 235). Even ten years ago it was very numerous, but by 1931 it was practically extinct. The destruction of the Puffin on Ailsa is generally believed to be due to rats. (See *The Birds of the Island of Bute.*) I give a photograph of Puffins on Ailsa taken by Charles Kirk. It is possible that Puffins may never be photographed here again. H. D. Graham, in *The Birds of Iona and Mull*, describes Puffins flying up Loch Cilp in large numbers on their way north, and then turning back to avoid having to cross the land. Presumably they had gone up the wrong side of Kintyre, and had to go round it again.

237. THE GREAT BUSTARD.

Otis tarda tarda L.

In an account of Maybole, Ayrshire, written in 1837, *Otis tarda* (the Great Bustard) is included, on the authority of Dr. M'Tyer of Redhouse, in a list of the rarer animals of the period (*New Stat. Acct.*, Vol. 5, 1845. See *Scot. Nat.*, 1924, p. 190). A Great Bustard, evidently a female from its small size, was washed up on the shore at Irvine, Ayrshire, on 20th June 1895, in a greatly decomposed condition (*J. S. N. H.*, 1895, p. 233).

238. THE CORNCRAKE.

Crex crex (L.)

The Corncrake is subject to great fluctuations in numbers, and owing to its remarkable cry these fluctuations are much more easily noticed than they are in the case

Puffins photographed on Ailsa Craig by Charles Kirk in 1906 (From J.M. McWilliam's Birds of the Firth of Clyde*).*

Illustration by John Busby

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No 66 December 2002

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Bill Gardner

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 24 January 2003 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC,**
Harbour Point,
Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh EH21 6SJ.

Articles and photographs can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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CLUB NOTICES

New Member of Council

Following an extremely close vote at the AGM, Jimmy Maxwell (Clyde Branch) was elected onto Council to replace Ken Shaw. We welcome Jimmy aboard and extend our grateful thanks to Ken for five years of valuable participation in the running of the Club.

Spring Conference and EGM

This year's SOC/BTO Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference is being hosted by the Ayrshire Branch on Saturday 15th March 2003. Notice is also given of a Club EGM to be held at that meeting. See enclosed booking form for more details.

New Fife recorder

The new recorder for Fife is **Davy Ogilvie**, 25 St Fillans Road, Kirkcaldy KY2 6LT. E-mail: davidogilvie8@aol.com Phone: 01592-269142. Records for 2002 should be sent to Davy in January 2003.

Davy takes over from Dougie Dickson, who held the post for 18 years! A tribute to Dougie's tremendous contribution to the Club and bird recording in Fife will appear in the next *SBN*.

SOC eNewsletter

The club has set up a members' e-mail group (also known as a mailing list or eGroup) with Yahoo! Groups. This will act as an electronic newsletter to keep members informed of news and events before they appear in *SBN*. The eGroup also enables us to let you know when updates have been made to the SOC website.

If you are familiar with other e-mail Groups, this one may be slightly different. It is set up so that only HQ and the website co-ordinator can post to the Group (so there will be no eSpam) and the number of e-mails will be kept to a minimum. Members cannot post to the Group directly. Basically an electronic newsletter from HQ, it is free to join and open to all SOC members with access to e-mail. To subscribe, just send a blank e-mail to: The-SOC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or visit the SOC website for more information.

Subscriptions Amnesty

A review of memberships last year highlighted a number of problems and nearly a third of members were individually contacted in an attempt to rectify these.

This year, in advance of the 1st October renewal date, we sent every member a personal reminder detailing the subscription payment that they owed. But as payments began to arrive it was soon apparent that many members were again paying the wrong amount.

The problem arises for several reasons, but the main culprit is the standing order. The SOC has no power to change the amount of a standing order and, as a result, many members have been paying the same amount for the last 10 years or more despite several changes to the membership rates. Many members have set up standing orders for the wrong amount in the first place, under the mistaken impression that a standing order was the same as a direct debit.

Last year, every member who had been underpaying was sent a letter to explain the situation and to request that they update their standing orders. While many members sent us cheques to cover their underpayments (for which we are most grateful) it seems that most did not change their standing orders and so this year it has been the same story all over again!

On the other hand, last year 40 members overpaid their subscriptions! Many paid by standing order and by cheque (and, in some cases, also by a third method!). If you ever change to another method of payment it is vitally important that you cancel your standing order otherwise you may be paying twice.

To avoid further confusion, we are trying to encourage members to switch from standing order to direct debit, the latter being much easier for us to work with. New members joining the SOC will now no longer be given the option of standing order as a method of payment.

For those members who haven't updated their standing order for more than five years, the current subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£20 (£18 by Direct Debit)
Family	£30 (£27 by Direct Debit)
Junior	£8 (£7 by Direct Debit)
Pensioner	£11 (£10 by Direct Debit)
Pensioner-Family	£16 (£14.50 by Direct Debit)
Unwaged	£11 (£10 by Direct Debit)

As you can imagine, corresponding with under-/overpaying members takes up an enormous amount of time and energy.

Subscriptions are the Club's greatest source of income and we rely on every one of them to survive. At the moment, collecting subscriptions from underpaying members is costing us nearly as much as we're getting from them in subscriptions!

If you think you might be paying too much or too little (or even if you're not entirely sure what the difference is between a standing order and direct debit), please check with your bank or contact me at Harbour Point. I promise I won't be coming round to your house to demand money with menaces and, for the lucky few, it's just possible that *we* owe *you* money!

Caroline Scott

Dotterel and chicks by Donald Watson, from Birds of Moor and Mountain *(Scottish Academic Press, 1972).*

200 Club

The winners from April to Sept 2002 were:

Apr 1st £50 A.D. McNeill; **2nd** £30 Mrs P. Collett; **3rd** £20 W.G. Prest; **4th** £10 Miss McCulloch. **May 1st** £50 Mrs V. Tulloch; **2nd** £30 A. Tewnion; **3rd** £20 Mrs J. Kinnear; **4th** £10 Miss. S. Taylor. **Jun 1st** £30 Prof. Jenkins; **2nd** £20 Mr and Mrs Burn; **3rd** £10 M.J. Everett. **Jul 1st** £30 Mrs Poyser; **2nd** £20 D.G. Walker; **3rd** £10 W.G. Prest. **Aug 1st** £30 P.W. Speak; **2nd** £20 S.F. Jackson; **3rd** £10 Mrs. S.F. Hewlett. **Sept 1st** £30 Mrs E.M. Smith; **2nd** £20 I. Balfour Paul; **3rd** £10 B. Etheridge.

There are some spaces still to be filled to keep the number up to 200. If you would like to join now for the rest of the year to May 2003, please contact me at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Donald Watson honoured

We are delighted to hear that Donald Watson, the Club's honorary president, has been made the first honorary member of the Society of Wildlife Artists. This tribute recognises Donald's long and distinguished service to wildlife art and conservation. Donald is very well known to SOC members and birdwatchers in general through his writing and distinctive artwork. Indeed, his paintings and drawings are considered by many to be the quintessence of Scottish wildlife art as they so evocatively capture the atmosphere of our landscape and its birds.

The SOC warmly congratulates Donald on this unique and well deserved honour. We hope to publish an interview with him in a forthcoming issue of *SBN*.

Research Grants

A reminder that the closing date for new applications for SOC Research Grants is 31 January 2003 and that the closing date for renewals (with fieldwork reports) is 31 December 2002. Details of the grants scheme can be found in a leaflet available from the SOC office.

Tom Dougall
Chair, Research & Surveys Committee

Advertising in *SBN*

SBN reaches more than 2,000 members here and overseas. Its overall readership is certainly much more than this and it is therefore an excellent way to promote your products or services to a particular interest group. Optical equipment, birding and wildlife holidays, hotels and

guest houses, new and secondhand natural-history books, outdoor clothing and garden bird products are just some of the commodities which would benefit from being advertised in *SBN*, and there are doubtless many more.

The rates (£) for advertising in *SBN* are as follows:

	B&W	Colour
Full page (188x252mm)	120.00	160.00
Half page (188x126mm)	80.00	100.00
Third of a page (57x252mm) (upright)	50.00	70.00
Sixth of a page (57x126mm) (upright)	30.00	40.00

Small ads will be charged at 10p per word. Inserts and fliers for mailing with *SBN* are also welcome. Prices would vary according to the size and weight of the material, but anything up to the size of a single A4 sheet would be £120. For larger items, please contact the office for details.

Adverts should be submitted as camera-ready hard copy or on disk. We can arrange to make up ads for you in-house for an additional charge of £30.00 per hour.

These rates replace all previous ones. The deadline for receipt of adverts is one month prior to publication, i.e. 1st February for March issue, 1st May for June issue, 1st August for September issue and 1st November for December issue. We hope members will support this initiative. Not only is it an effective way to reach your particular market, but it also supports the SOC and its publications.

Thanks

Many thanks to John Busby for granting us the use of his drawings and paintings for *SBN*, some of which appear in this issue. We are also very grateful to Hugh Harrop (Shetland Wildlife, www.hughharrop.com) and Harry Scott (Pica Design/*Birding Scotland,* www.birdingscotland.org.uk) whose rarity shots regularly appear in Recent Reports, and to Daniel Stenberg (from Sweden) for his recent photographs. Artwork and photographs are always welcome to make *SBN* as attractive as possible.

Thanks also to all those who helped pack the September mailing: Roger Brewer, Liz and Mike Fraser, Sue Goode, Keith Macgregor, Vicky McLellan, Betty Smith, Noreen Stabler and Joan Wilcox. The team was kept in order by Jill Andrews, Bill Gardner and Caroline Scott.

Bill Gardner shows some droukit delegates the Aberlady site. Left-right: Duncan Watt, Norman Lawrie, Bill Gardner, Derick Watson and Henry Martin. (Ian Andrews)

Aberlady Workshop

On 12th October 2002, members from Ayrshire, Borders, Fife, Lothian and Tayside Branches met at Aberlady in East Lothian to see the proposed site for the new HQ and Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, to be known as "Waterston House". Participants were also given the opportunity to meet the project architects, Stewart Brown and Sarah Worrall of Simpson & Brown, Leith. (S&B were the architects of the award-winning Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick which was initiated and developed by Bill Gardner).

Despite the downpours, all those present, including Club president Ian Andrews and past presidents Stan da Prato, Ray Murray and Frank Hamilton, were able to visit the site and assess its potential. At a meeting held afterwards at the Kilspindie House Hotel, chaired by Bill, we were presented with ideas from the architects and given their response to the development reports which had been prepared by HQ staff and endorsed by Council and Management Committees.

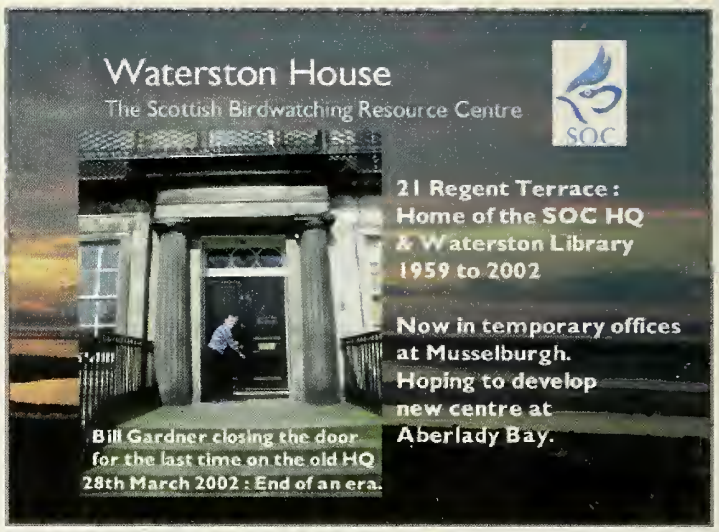
It was unanimously agreed that the outstanding views north and east over the Bay should be exploited to enhance the building. The building itself should also be made as attractive as possible through the use of natural materials and sympathetic landscaping with native plants. To make the premises as sustainable as possible it was agreed that the design should be compact and easy to manage and maintain, with a floor area of between 250 and 300 square metres.

Discussions also covered key points such as flexible spaces for meetings, courses and exhibitions, parking arrangements, facilities for visitors and researchers, and how best to accommodate the Waterston Library and Club Archive in addition to office spaces.

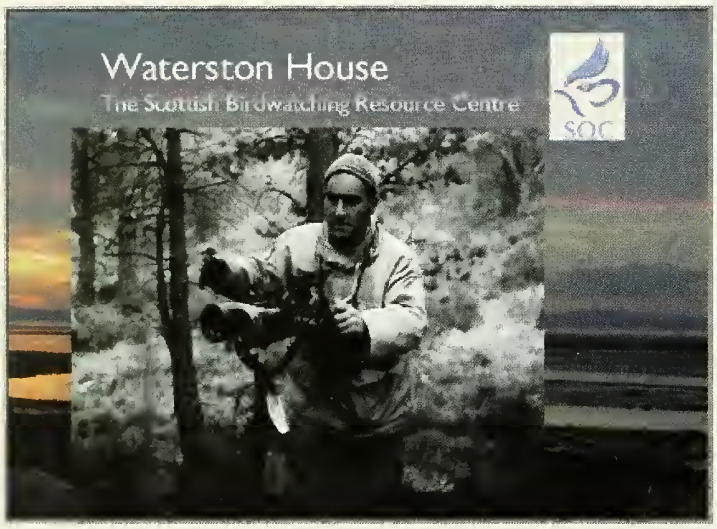
Other workshops will be held once design information becomes available. The process of managing the development of the new centre will be supervised by the Property Working Group, a sub committee of the Management Committee. Day-to-day project management will be carried out by the SOC Development Manager.

Copies of the slide presentation about the site and the development of the design brief which Bill recently gave to the Annual Conference are available on CD as an MS Powerpoint presentation for Mac and PC with accompanying notes.

Slide 1: This is a summary of my presentation to the SOC 2002 Conference at the Balavil Sports Hotel, Newtonmore. If you require more details contact Bill Gardner, SOC Development Manager, on 0131 653 0653 or via email.


Waterston House
The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre
SOC
21 Regent Terrace : Home of the SOC HQ & Waterston Library 1959 to 2002
Now in temporary offices at Musselburgh. Hoping to develop new centre at Aberlady Bay.
Bill Gardner closing the door for the last time on the old HQ 28th March 2002 : End of an era.

Slide 2: Long before selling 21 Regent Terrace in March 2002 the SOC had been searching for a suitable location for a new centre for ornithology in Scotland to house the Waterston Library, Club HQ and educational resources.



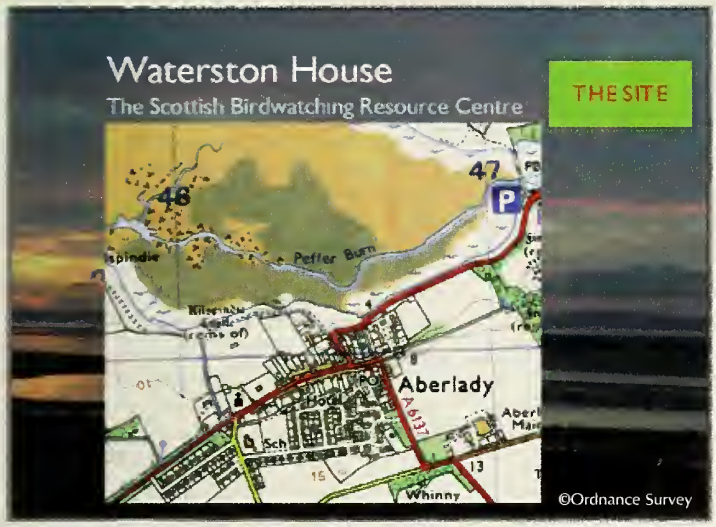
Slide 3: George Waterston was the SOC's first development manager and it was his vision, network of contacts and persistence that helped the SOC grow as a club from 1936. George also set up the SOC HQ at 21 Regent Terrace in 1959.

Slide 4: Birdwatchers now use new technologies such as pagers, the Internet, digital video camcorders and digi-scoping to help them locate, view and photograph birds in new ways. The SOC needs to respond to these changes.

Slide 5: Apart from seeking suggestions from the membership for a suitable site for the new Centre, various recent publications were studied for sites which had a good location, variety of habitats, species and numbers of birds.

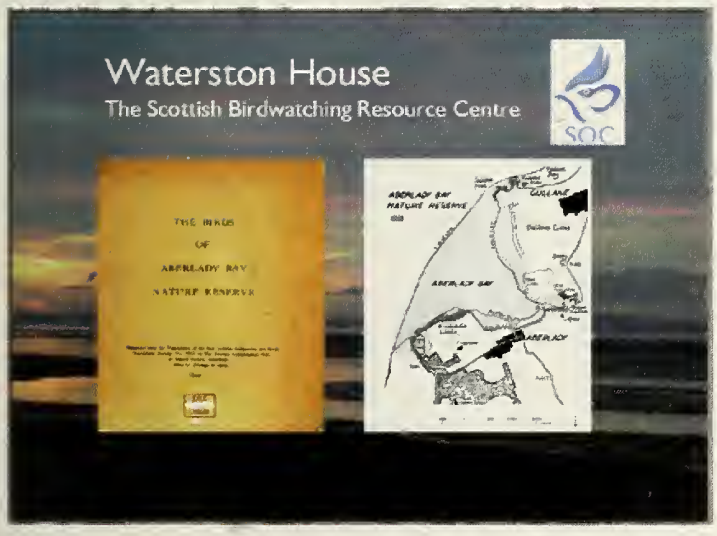
Slide 6: Aberlady Bay is in the middle of a prime Scottish birding "strip" containing very high quality birding sites, along with the possibility of migrants and rarities during spring and autumn. There is also a large goose roost.

A selection of 12 slides taken from a 48 slide sequence of still and video material shown at Conference



Slide 7: The site is on the left side of the main road at the west end of the entrance to Aberlady village. It is currently part of the Craigielaw Golf Course, owned by the Wemyss and March Estate, who have agreed a fair sale price.

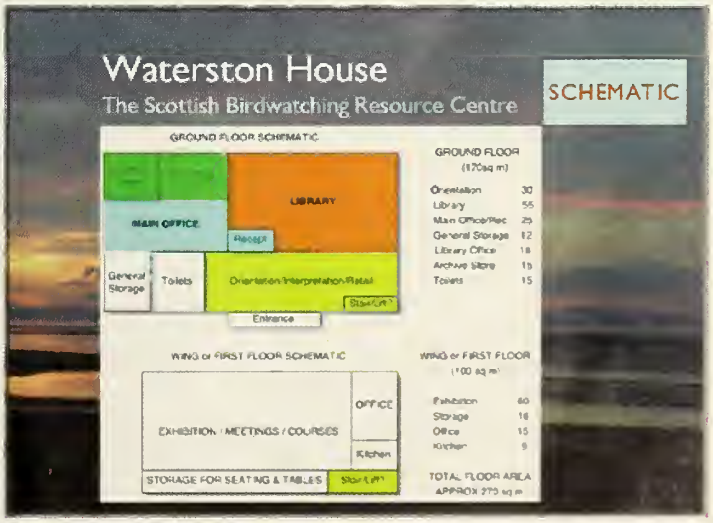
Slide 8: The site is just seven minutes walk from the Bay via the lane at the side of the kirkyard. Five minutes walk takes you into the village. You will be able to enjoy several circular walks on the coast and in Gosford policies and woods.



Slide 9: SOC members in the 1950s were instrumental in helping the Bay to be designated as the first Local Nature Reserve in the UK. Frank Hamilton and Keith Macgregor produced this survey in 1960.

Slide 10: This photo, taken from the bus stop, shows the site entrance and the John Muir Coastal Path, with the village starting just beyond the lamp standard. All the necessary utility services are on the left of the access road.

Slide 11: An attractive Centre, with many birds nearby, will help the SOC recruit new members, bring volunteers to the HQ and hopefully persuade external funders, such as SNH and HLF to contribute to the cost of its design and development.



Slide 12: This diagram shows roughly the room spaces we envisage and their approximate relative sizes. For comparison, the SOC used 230sq m in 21 Regent Terrace. Target size for the new Centre is 270sq m, with a total cost of £650k.

BRANCH NEWS

The Fife Bird Atlas

In *SBN* 64 (June 2002), there was a short article on current atlas projects in Scotland. Readers may be interested to note that one of these, the Fife Bird Atlas, is nearing completion, with publication aimed for spring 2003.

Fieldwork aimed at mapping the breeding and non-breeding distribution of birds in Fife was started in 1991. This fieldwork, carried out by Fife's birdwatchers (many of them belonging to the SOC and Fife Bird Club), was completed in 1999. All records have been computer encoded using the database of the Fife Region Biological Records Centre *Fife Nature* (recently renamed Fife Environmental Recorder Network [*FERN*]). The outcome of this has been detailed maps of breeding distribution on a 2x2km (tetrad) grid and complementary monthly maps of non-breeding distribution on a 5x5km grid. This will be the core of a publication that will, for the first time, map all Fife's birds in great detail.

Unlike many atlases, the value of Fife's Atlas will be enhanced by the inclusion of data throughout the year. Not only will maps of our own fieldwork be shown, but data from a variety of other ornithological surveys are also used. These include long-running national censuses of wintering wildfowl and shorebirds, ringing records, seabird censuses, migration counts, and a host of other smaller surveys carried out during the period of the Atlas fieldwork.

The publication is being overseen by the Fife Ornithological Atlas Group (FOAG), which was established in 1990 to organise the fieldwork. The Group's Chairman is Jim Reid, who co-authored the second national Breeding Bird Atlas and who heads the Seabirds and Cetaceans team at JNCC, Aberdeen. Jim is a resident of Fife, as are most of the authors responsible for the species accounts in the text of the book. These authors are experts who are very familiar with Fife and its birds. The Secretary of the Group, with responsibility for co-ordinating the production of the Atlas, is Norman Elkins, author of the book *Weather and Bird Behaviour* and BTO Regional Representative for Fife. Other members of the group include Allan Brown, long known for goose and swan studies and WeBS organising, and Anne-Marie Smout, author of *The Birds of Fife* and chairperson of BRISC. Artwork is being co-ordinated by Derek Robertson, the renowned wildlife artist resident in Fife and author of many wildlife art publications, as well as being chairman of the Tay Ringing Group.

The book is expected to be in A4 format with two pages allocated to most of the breeding species described. For each species there will be a text and breeding distribution map, with other maps of non-breeding distribution chosen to depict seasonal variation. One or two pages will also be allocated to non-breeding species, with seasonal distribution maps depicted. Appropriate figures showing quantitative data will be included for those species for which these are available. Data will also be used from the Forth islands that form part of the region, including the Isle of May, courtesy of the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust.

The participation of *FERN* in the production of maps has been an important step towards final publication. A total of 125 species has been recorded breeding in the 386 tetrads, and a further 88 non-breeding species have been recorded in the 75 5km squares. The amount of data is therefore enormous. About a quarter-of-a-million records have been generated and will be held on *FERN's* database for future use. The data form a unique baseline with which to measure changes in Fife's bird populations and to act as an important conservation tool. SNH, SOC and Fife Regional Council are supporting the project and grants have been received from several other organisations. The print-run of the book will probably be around 500, estimated costs for which will be in the order of £25-£30 per book.

For further information or to reserve a copy, please contact Norman Elkins at: Secretary FOAG, 18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 5DX. Phone: 01334 654348 Email: jandnelkins@rapidial.co.uk

Norman Elkins

The Speyside Weekend

It's not every week that a Fife SOC trip ends up filmed by national television. That's what happened when nine members of the Speyside long weekend encountered a Channel 5 camera crew sheltering from the Highland drizzle at Loch Insh. Bored with waiting for passing adventure racers on the "Red Bull Northern Exposure Challenge" (a bizarre combination of running, canoeing, swimming and shooting over 120 miles of Cairngorm terrain), the telly tubbies spotted the opportunity to add some local colour to their report. Swiftly producing a few cans of their sponsor's brew, the producers sought our on-camera endorsement.

Minutes later they were already regretting their decision. "Tastes like ****. Wouldn't drink it if you paid me." I'm afraid this footage will not be appearing in the "Red Bull" corporate video.

The weekend started in fine style with the early-morning Capercaillie watch at the RSPB's Loch Garten reserve. It was all action. Males were strutting their stuff, vying to outdo each other in their efforts to impress. Females looked on with studied disinterest. The males tried harder. It was nature in the raw, up close and personal.

After this short interlude, the male members of our group dragged themselves away from the RSPB's remarkably charming "Caper Wardens" and turned their attention to action outside the hide. First there was a distant male Caper slipping in and out of view between the pines. Then a moment of excitement as a second (or perhaps the same?) strolled within a few yards of the hide. Then another was found munching pine needles in a tree. And all the while the female Osprey gazed down from her favoured perch. We were off to a cracking start for more "Highland Specials".

Some were easier than others. Crested Tit? Not a sniff. Slavonian Grebe? Just the one, golden ear-tufts shining in the Saturday-morning sunshine. Black Grouse? Four were lekking on a nearby moor. Peregrine? No sign in the Sunday morning drizzle. Capercaillie? Another magnificent cock strolled across the road in front of our cars.

My personal highlight was a sun-bathed Saturday afternoon at Lochindorb, where four summer-plumaged Black-throated Divers put on a magnificent show. Superb! Others marvelled at a pair of their Red-throated cousins on Loch Morlich. Do they breed here or were they just en route?

We never did get to grips with the latest twists in the great crossbill debate. Is it really true that 75% of crossbills in Abernethy Forest are Parrot Crossbills? The only one I saw looked very much like a Common, although other members of the group had tantalising glimpses of a suspiciously large-billed individual. The mystery remains, but it's a good reason to return another day.

Warmest thanks are due to our leader Rob Lambert, and also to Simon and Fiona Eaves, whose local knowledge and warm welcome made it a truly special weekend. As for Channel 5, no one watches it anyway. And who needs "Red Bull" for stimulation when you can enjoy the great birding that this marvellous part of Scotland has to offer?

James Walsh
(From* Fife Branch Newsletter *95: 2)

SHORT NOTES

An unusual Woodpigeon nest?

A letter in *Africa - Birds and Birding* [7(4)8] about a wire dove's nest in Lincolnshire and written in response to an article about a Rock Pigeon's nest made of wire in Kimberley, South Africa, encouraged me to report a similar discovery in my garden near Dunbar this year.

On 5th August I was puzzled to find, scattered over my lawn, lengths of thin, rusty wire, one nearly three feet long. I then spotted a piece hanging from a cherry tree overhead, not far from the usual Woodpigeon nest in that tree. After putting my brain into gear I realised that the nest looked unusual and decided to remove it (partly to avoid later damage to the lawnmower!). It was composed entirely of woven bits of thin, fine wire. The wire looked familiar and it was not difficult to trace it to a bonfire in a neighbour's garden where a tyre had been burnt, leaving a heap of crumbling wire in the ashes.

Was this pigeon's nest just opportunism? In August this area is smothered in lush, green vegetation, so perhaps there is a shortage of dry twigs for a late-season nest (although several empty pigeon nests in other trees were available for pilfering).

There is a postscript to this story. I returned from holiday on 1st October to find more bits of wire under a nearby cherry-plum tree and found a new nest containing a single egg. This nest was mainly twigs and heather prunings, but had a base of the same wire, remnants from the bonfire site cleared in August.

Nancy J. Gordon

The Musselburgh Swans

The Mute Swans at Musselburgh often make the news – many locals take a keen interest in them and 2002 was no exception for a variety of reasons.

Mute Swans at Musselburgh. (Ian Andrews)

A couple of pairs usually nests on the River Esk in the town, and despite the Council's near-destruction on the favoured island (in the name of flood control), a record number of five pairs bred in 2002. Mute Swans are typically very territorial, often extremely so, and it was rare indeed to see three nests on one 15m-long island, and another not far away. Unfortunately, this part of the river is tidal and two of the nests were flooded in late May; one relaid, but later failed for a second time.

Colour-ringing of the Lothian swans means that the lives of many of them can be followed individually. In 2002 four birds changed partners from last year (per A. W. Brown)! The late-summer flock of non-breeding swans has also become a feature of Musselburgh in recent years. A record number of 210 was counted on 27th July. As well as being fed with as many white loaves as they can manage, the Musselburgh Mute Swans also have to contend with the annual "duck race" when a couple of hundred plastic ducks are raced down the river every July. The picture shows one of the local family's reaction to this invasion of *Anas platyplasticus multicolorii*.

Ian Andrews

REQUESTS

In search of Donald Watson's Black Redstart

The Isle of May, 8 April, 1958; an icy wind chilling Gordon Elliot and me to the bone as we schoolboys went down to the East Landing to await the arrival of two more birdwatchers - artist Donald Watson and his botanist brother Eric (who was researching bryophytes on the island).

Gordon and I had been up-and-about in search of spring migrants since before dawn ("since 3:35 a.m." notes my precocious diary!). But it was down at the landing, and quite by chance, that we found the bird-of-the-day, freshly dead in a sheltered rock cranny. So when the Watsons leapt onto the jetty from the *Fair Morn*, skippered by Willie Hughes, we were not only ready to help carry their gear but also holding out for their inspection a male Black Redstart in fine breeding plumage.

Back in the glowing warmth of the Low Light, Donald almost immediately began painting a watercolour study of the bird. This was doubly awe-inspiring: the first time we had watched an artist capture delicate beauty, and the first time we had seen a Black Redstart!

Decades later I have asked Donald what became of the painting. He doesn't remember it going to a collector, nor can he find it in his studio. Donald, Gordon and I would all be very interested to hear of its whereabouts. I would very much like to buy the painting, or at least to have a photograph of it, as it marks an indelible moment of revelation in my learning to appreciate birds.

If any SOC member has any clues or information as to the painting's whereabouts, please contact me at Egghölzliweg 5, CH-3074 Muri, Switzerland (phone: 0041 31 951 71 03, e-mail: peter.holt@bluewin.ch).

(As I write, our local Black Redstart is in full song on the roof of our house near Berne. By mid-October he will have flown south and we'll be listening for his return in March).

Peter Holt

Colour-dyed Twite

During winter 2002 a number of ringers in various regions of Scotland will be colour-dyeing Twite through a collaborative project. One main objective of the study is to increase our knowledge of winter dispersal. Could you please look out for any marks on Twite, noting dye colour, location of dye, date and grid reference. Please report any sightings to the Secretary of the Colour-Dyeing Twite Project: Lyn Wells, Findon Cottage, Clashmore, Dornoch, Sutherland IV21 3RG. E-mail: Lazytrout@care4free.net Tel: 01862 881 257.

All sightings will be acknowledged. Thank you for any help you can give.

Twite (Lyn Wells)

Dumfries & Galloway Report Special Offer!

The *Dumfries and Galloway Bird Report 1999-2000* (double issue) is available at the special price of £3.50. Please order your copy from Joan Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Castle Douglas DG7 3UW.

Seabird Studies on Foula in 2002

Ornithologists from the Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences at the University of Glasgow continued observations of seabird numbers, breeding success, diets and ecology on Foula in 2002 as we have done over the past 30 years. A new research project was initiated, called DISCBIRD and funded by the European Commission. This investigates effects of changes in discarding rates (the unwanted fish and fish parts jettisoned at sea from fishing boats) on seabird communities. Part of the work is being carried out on Foula, with the Bonxie (Great Skua) the focus of attention. Under DISCBIRD we investigated diet and breeding of Bonxies, survival rates of colour-ringed birds and their body condition and timing of breeding in relation to diet. Work included testing of satellite transmitter packages on harness fitted to adult Bonxies and the equipping of adults during July with data loggers and satellite transmitters to track their movements at sea through the winter.

Steve Votier and Jon Crane were employed as research assistants on the DISCBIRD project. Sarah Davis, in her second season of PhD fieldwork, worked with Sheila Gear to census Arctic Skuas, record surviving colour-ringed adults and trap Arctic Skuas on the nest. She measured body condition of trapped adults, with particular attention to the status of these birds in the previous season in terms of their achieved breeding success and their provision with supplementary food. Stephen Oswald began his PhD studies, primarily supervised by Keith Hamer of University of Leeds, on the microclimate of Bonxies and influences of weather conditions on skua behaviour. His work included behavioural observations of individually colour-ringed Bonxies as well as collecting climate data from several different study areas in northeast Foula.

The 2002 seabird breeding season at Foula can be summarised as the worst documented since 1971, and probably the worst in living memory. There was evidently a severe shortage of sandeels, affecting almost all species but having drastic effects on Arctic Terns, Arctic Skuas, Red-throated Divers, Kittiwakes, Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins. Arctic Tern breeding numbers were greatly reduced (around 400 pairs were present but few laid eggs, and hardly any chicks were hatched). Arctic Skua breeding numbers were also severely reduced (101 Apparently Occupied Territories [AOTs] but only 84 pairs known to have laid eggs), and only seven chicks were reared to fledging. Divers had exceptionally few chicks (only two survived into July). Kittiwakes on the Noup had small numbers of chicks surviving to half size in mid-July, but most other Kittiwake colonies at Foula were deserted or failed. Shags suffered high chick mortality during June, with dead chicks in 20-30% of nests. Such drastic brood reduction has certainly not been seen on Foula in any of the last 30 years. Guillemot breeding was extremely late (a trend shared by almost all the other species) and many chicks were taken by Great Black-backed Gulls and Bonxies from rather poorly-attended ledges. Razorbills seemed to rear quite good numbers of chicks, but these were very late to fledge and were being fed on very small fish. Puffin activity was moderate, suggesting some breeding success but, again, with very small fish being carried to burrows. Only Gannets seemed to have a "good" breeding season. Bonxies had problems finding food during May and June, and lost many eggs and small chicks, but those chicks that survived into July then grew well as food availability apparently improved later in the season, though with periods of plenty and shortage on different dates through July.

A colour-ringed Bonxie on Foula.
(Bob Furness)

This improvement for Bonxies was not due to sandeel recruitment, as the large chicks were being fed almost entirely on discards, herring and mackerel, with an abundance of herring leading to very high weights of Bonxie chicks in mid-July. There was a suggestion of some improvement in sandeel availability in July, however, with exceptionally late replacement clutches laid by two pairs of Red-throated Divers in early July, and Puffins, Razorbills and Guillemots carrying large numbers of small sandeels (and also small fish of other species). Bonxies fed on sandeels to an extent during May and June, but their diet was dominated by discards, while there was an increasing amount of herring in their diet during July. In contrast, Great Black-backed Gull loafing numbers were very low and their diet was composed of high quantities of Guillemot eggs and chicks as well as discards.

We obtained evidence that there have been at least as many Foula-ringed Arctic Skuas recruiting to Fair Isle in recent years as returning to their natal colony. An unusual result of the very late breeding season of the Arctic Skuas this year, combined with a rather early departure of many Bonxies during late July, was that the conflict between Arctic Skuas and Bonxies was reduced in the later part of the season, with little sign of Bonxies attempting to kill Arctic Skua chicks or fledglings. The severe shortage of sandeels led several adult Arctic Skuas to attempt to steal Bonxie eggs from unattended clutches during May-June. This is the first time we have seen Arctic Skuas regularly hunting deliberately around Bonxie nests, a habit that seemed remarkably risky and presumably a "last resort" in a difficult season.

Our oldest colour-ringed Bonxie was still alive and breeding in 2002. First ringed as a chick in 1968, it is now 34 years old. Eleven birds were fitted with satellite transmitters and five with data loggers for geolocation using light intensity. The 11 adults given satellite transmitters were regularly observed by Jon Crane during late July. Their behaviour appeared to be comparable to that of 'control' adults (those without transmitters) . In August two of the satellite-tracked birds were on the Dogger Bank, one in the Skagerrak, two in the Moray Firth and the other six in the Shetland area, though rarely returning to Foula and travelling widely around the northern isles region as far west as the continental shelf edge. At the time of writing (late October) our Bonxies have been doing us proud. Most migrated through the southern North Sea and English Channel and are now in the Bay of Biscay.

One went up and down the continental shelf edge past west Ireland to Spain, while another visited the south of Sweden for a while before heading south. Another has gone all the way past the Canaries to just off the coast of Western Sahara.

The Kittiwake study colony at which we routinely ring birds on the Noup had 121 nests visible from the monitoring point on 10 July. Of these, 72 were empty, 12 contained eggs, 34 contained single chicks and three contained broods of two chicks. As usual, there was no evidence of any predators taking chicks from the colony, so the evidence suggested that breeding failures were due to chick starvation rather than to predators. Adult body weights varied from 290-425g, with a median of 350g. This is the same median and virtually the same weight range as recorded in 2001, but represents one of the lowest weights of any year since 1986, and about 30g below 'normal'.

Apparently only about 400 pairs of Arctic Terns settled on Foula during May. Many of these birds temporarily abandoned the colony and then resettled a few days later (or possibly were replaced by other birds arriving later). Either way, maximum numbers in the colony at any time never reached more than about half the numbers consistently present in 2000 and 2001. Many of the birds that did settle never produced eggs, and most of the few that did abandoned breeding attempts during late May or June. Very few chicks hatched and hardly any of these seem to have survived for long. There were reports that two or three chicks did survive to fledge, but by early July the Arctic Terns were largely absent from Foula.

Guillemot breeding in 2002 was exceptionally late. It seems that very few chicks had fledged before 10 July and most chicks on that date were still a few days too young to fledge. Adults bringing fish into colonies carried some sandeels of around 12-14 cm length (about one third of the fish brought in) which would be the normal food carried by all Guillemots in most years, but also some sandeels of only 6-8 cm (one third of samples) and small fish that appear to be young gadoids (one third of samples). This is the first time that fish other than large sandeels have formed a noticeable part of Guillemot chick diet at Foula.

On 10 July, Puffin activity was moderate, though rather few were seen carrying fish. The few with loads had large numbers of very small fish. A few dead, emaciated, fluffy Puffin chicks were found lying around the entrances of burrows, but far less than in 2001. Several Razorbill chicks were present on and under rocks from the Sneck to Wester Hoevdi on 10th July, suggesting that the Razorbills were managing to rear chicks more successfully than the Puffins, but loads being carried by Razorbills also comprised very small fish, and it was difficult to tell if these were sandeels or included other fish fry.

Migrants and other scarce birds on Foula during the summer, recorded mainly by Steve Votier, included Honey Buzzard, Common Crane, Bluethroat, Savi's, Great Reed, Marsh, Subalpine and Arctic Warblers, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes, Rosy Starling, Golden Oriole and Common Rosefinch.

Our fieldwork was supported by SOTEAG, the European Commission (project DISCBIRD), and by postgraduate studentships from NERC (Sarah Davis; Stephen Oswald). We particularly thank Sheila Gear for her efforts in helping Sarah Davis record and trap Arctic skuas.

R.W. Furness
r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk

Arctic Terns (John Busby)

BIRD ARTISTS IN SCOTLAND - John Busby

John Busby's unique style and ability to capture the character and vitality of his subjects make him the natural successor to Eric Ennion, an artist whom he greatly admires and who was an important teacher and abiding influence. A page of text, be it scientific treatise or magazine article, is brought to life if there is a Busby bird on it. He is well known to birdwatchers through his illustrations in over 30 books, among them monographs (such as *The Gannet* and *The Sulidae*), and regional accounts (including Jordan, Ireland, Shetland and his own *Birds in Mallorca*). No species is beyond him and, with uncanny speed and economy of line, he portrays penguins, owls, boobies or buntings with equal liveliness and conviction. As well as innate talent, this mastery derives from a deep understanding of bird structure and behaviour and countless hours of studying and drawing so many of his subjects from life.

John Busby sketching on the East Lothian coast. (Derek Hyatt)

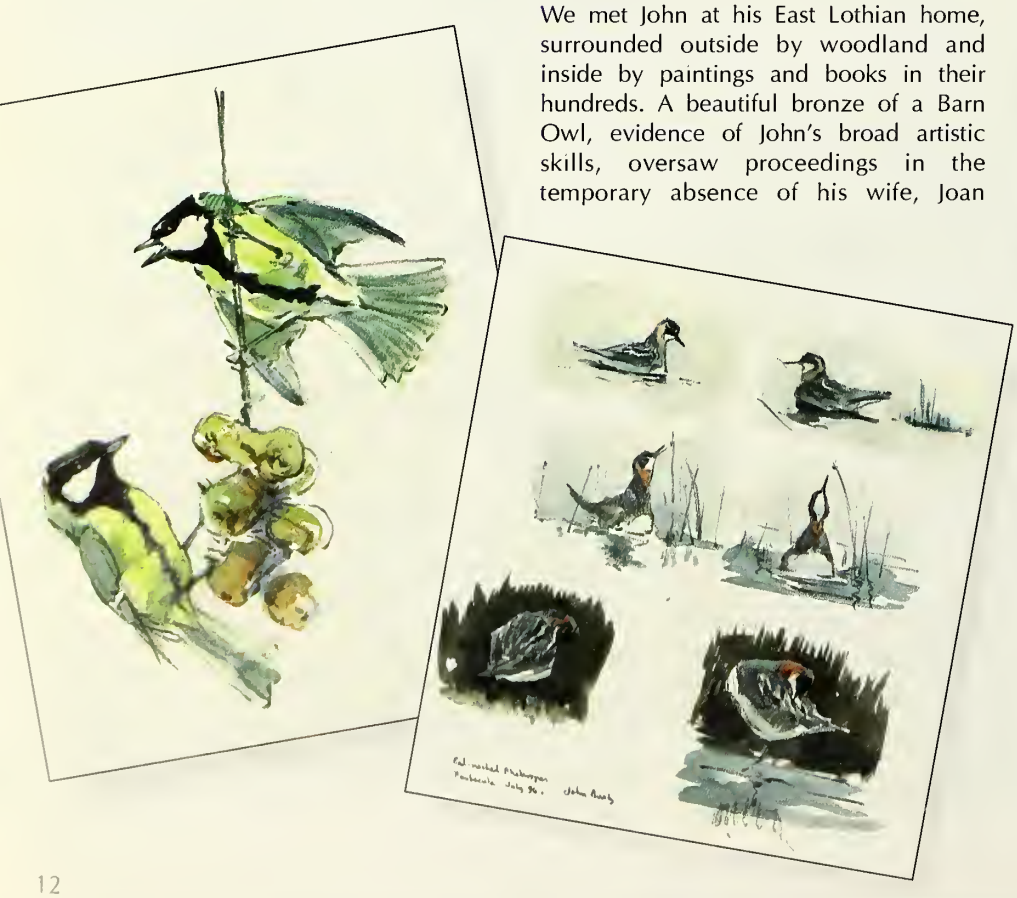
A Yorkshireman by birth, John remembers drawing at the age of six, his favourite subjects being lions and tigers fighting (which we assume were not drawn from life). Later in his childhood he moved on to more intriguing compositions, such as Ocelots and white Peacocks in a zoo with people looking in to their cages! A copy of Richard Talbot Kelly's *The Way of Birds*, given to him by his Aunt Rita, opened his eyes to birds as he felt they really should be depicted, not in poses fabricated by the artist.

At school John excelled at art but not, by his own admission, a lot else. He studied at Leeds College of Art and, following postgraduate studies at Edinburgh College of Art, returned to the latter to lecture in drawing and painting, a position he held until his retirement in 1988. "Retirement" is anything but the appropriate word, as his art has occupied him full-time ever since.

We met John at his East Lothian home, surrounded outside by woodland and inside by paintings and books in their hundreds. A beautiful bronze of a Barn Owl, evidence of John's broad artistic skills, oversaw proceedings in the temporary absence of his wife, Joan (whom he first met in the University Singers! Although having a degree in pharmacology, Joan is a professional musician and one of the most highly regarded singing teachers in the country).

What would SOC members like to know about John?, we wondered. An appropriate, if unimaginative, opening gambit, we thought, would be to ask what is his favourite bird? A refreshingly flexible approach results in it being the one that he happens to be drawing at the time! This enviable outlook must make life very satisfying and enjoyable. He declares, however, a particular fondness for Cranes. That he finds them beautiful and inspirational became apparent when we visited his studio - the spacious loft of an ancient stable block - and found more Cranes there than in your average shipyard. Most prominent were expansive canvases, six feet or more across, depicting dancing birds among the late spring snows of Sweden. Although they can appear awkward and ungainly, the Cranes have a mystical grace and elegance about them, a spiritual quality sought and captured by John in a tradition which has its roots in the art and religion of the east. Certainly the Cranes comfortably conform with Francis Bacon's observation that "There is no beauty that hath not some strangeness in its proportions".

The bird that John would most like to see is, of all things, Steller's Sea Eagle. We were almost surprised, given the number of countries that he has visited to watch

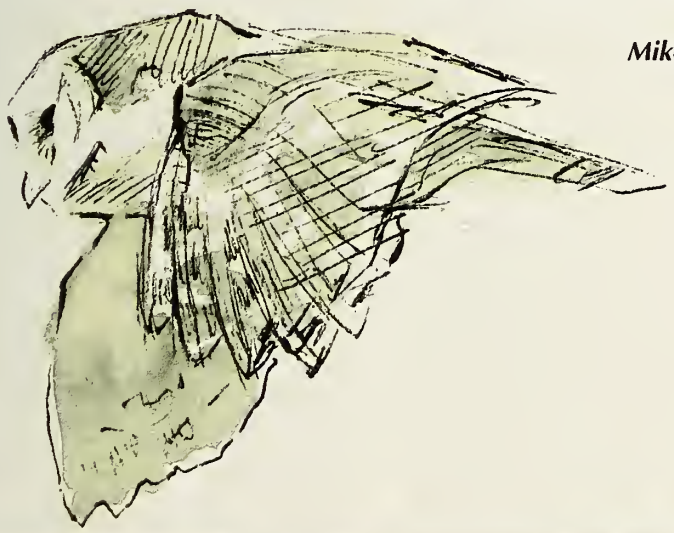


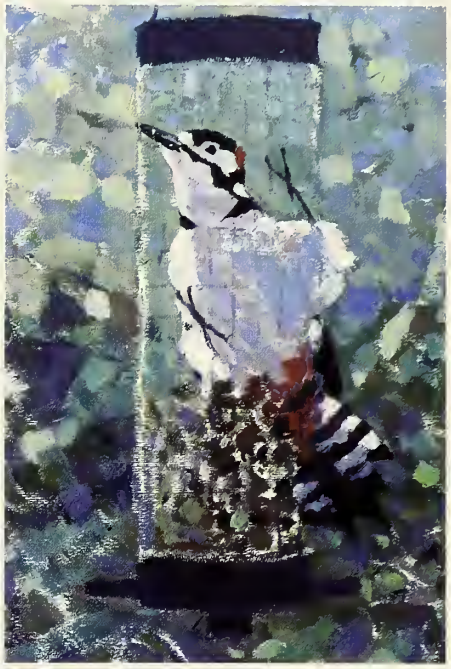
and draw birds, that he hasn't yet seen one. Although he has travelled extensively, he retains a special affection for Malham Tarn in the Yorkshire dales, an area whose landscape and wildlife made such an impression in his formative years and to which he regularly returns. He hasn't always had to go far to see quality birds - a pair of Hawfinches feeding nestlings were once visible from his bathroom window, a record outclassed only by a White's Thrush found dead under another window in October 1998 (a sketch of which appeared on the cover of that year's *Lothian Bird Report*).

John is very active around East Lothian, painting and sketching at favourite spots such as Tyninghame, Aberlady and Gosford Bay. Since 1988 he has run an annual seabird painting-and-drawing course based at North Berwick. This is invariably fully subscribed, with many participants returning in subsequent years.

Although very much the "birdwatcher's artist", John Busby is much more than a painter of wildlife. He finds natural beauty, and the challenge to interpret and portray it in conventional or abstract form, anywhere and everywhere, be it a Nebraska landscape from the air, an Alpine snowfield, a Yorkshire tarn, the hulk of a Forth island or a rock pool at Tyninghame. All are worlds in themselves and it is these worlds that John captures and communicates with such brilliance.

Mike and Liz Fraser





John Busby is a founder member of the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA) and a board member of the Artists for Nature Foundation. He is an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy and a member of the Royal Scottish Watercolour Society. John's work can be seen on his website (www.johnbusby-artist.com) and in many publications, notably his own books: Drawing Birds *(RSPB),* Birds in Mallorca *(Christopher Helm) and* John Busby Nature Drawings *(Arlequin Press). He exhibits annually with the SWLA (www.swla.co.uk) and Royal Scottish Academy.*

REVIEWS

Regional bird reports are at the heart of Scottish birding. From field observations to final production, they reflect the enthusiasm and hard work of many dedicated birders. The following reports were recently received at the office. Please note that some of them cover 2000, others 2001. Prices include p&p.

Angus and Dundee Bird Report 2001. Edited by Dan Carmichael (SOC Tayside Branch).

This is the 13th annual report for the area. Highlights included Black Redstarts and Smew in January, Snow Geese in March, Hobbies in May and June, 300 Little Gulls in July, 600 Velvet Scoters in September and 39,000 Pink-footed Geese in November. Best birds of the year were Nuthatch (third county record), Red-breasted Goose (first) and Ivory Gull (second).

The systematic list details the 219 species recorded. Tabulated counts are given for Mute Swan, Pink-footed Goose, three duck and three gull species. A fall in Ruddy Duck numbers is noted. Reports of Marsh Harrier declined, but 27 records of Goshawk were double the previous year's. Peak wader counts included 1,850 Lapwing, 2,800 Knot, 1,200 Curlew and 2,550 Redshank. Autumn thrush passage was very pronounced, with 3,000 Blackbirds, 2,500 Fieldfares, 4,800 Song Thrushes and 8,000 Redwings on some coastal stretches in late October.

A list of first and last dates for summer and winter migrants gives some targets to beat (although Sedge Warbler on 30th December (*sic*) will be a challenge!). The Tay Ringing Group report is interesting, a view probably not shared by the six Ring Ouzels killed by Peregrines. A paper by Alan Leitch on the Black-necked Grebe describes how the species is declining at Loch of Kinnordy, its county stronghold.

The report concludes with accounts of the Ivory Gull and Red-breasted Goose, a weather summary, gazetteer and map. There are attractive line drawings and the excellent colour photos include Kingfisher and Gadwall. Notwithstanding the very smart Ivory Gull, one of the nicest shots is a trio of Cootlings!

Report sales: £3.50 from Dr James Whitelaw, 36 Burn St, Dundee DD3 0LB.

Argyll Bird Report 2000. Edited by Clive Craik and Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Club).

This report begins with a plea for the more timeous submission and more help with the processing of observations. This must sound all-too-familiar to most compilers and editors.

Excluding escapes, 215 species were recorded in Argyll in 2000; Pacific Golden Plover and White-rumped Sandpiper brought the county list to 320. On the down side, there have been no records of Grey Partridge since 1998 and it was the fourth successive blank year for Tree Sparrow.

A review of the year includes the ornithological highlights and weather summaries ("cold" and "wet" crop up with depressing regularity). A Common Sandpiper in January was the first winter record. Greenland White-fronts on Islay were well down on 1999, but Barnacles were steady. The first Wheatear arrived on 13th March with, more surprisingly, Whinchat on 19th. Migration got well underway in April and included good wader passage, Hoopoe, Hawfinch and a new species for Tiree - a Bullfinch!

The breeding season is described as "reasonably good". Four pairs of Ospreys fledged nine chicks and there were 252 calling Corncrakes. Arctic Tern performance improved and Tiree held 53 pairs of Little Terns, with at least 22 pairs elsewhere. Less than a quarter the number of Arctic Skuas was present than in 1987, however, the biggest decline being on Jura. Shearwaters, skuas and waders were on the move by late July. The first Balearic Shearwater was seen off Islay on 5th August, with two Red-necked Phalaropes off Machrihanish the next day. A September highlight was 153 Mistle Thrushes passing through Cairnbaan on 28th. The year's only Marsh Harrier was seen on 1st October, the month also producing two rare waders - Lesser Yellowlegs (which graces the cover) and Pacific Golden Plover. Ten wintering Blackcaps were reported in November, and December was brightened by a Kingfisher and an influx of Waxwings.

The individual species accounts are very detailed and are derived from general observations and surveys including BBS, CBC, *Countryside 2000*, WeBs and systematic seawatches. Wildfowl, wader and gull counts are tabulated, as are Corncrake numbers and distribution. Interesting reports include the female Sparrowhawk killing and eating another of the same, and the Osprey chick ringed near Loch Awe in 1998 and found dead inside a crocodile in the Gambia. The report concludes with a section on Guidelines for Observers and an account of the White-rumped Sandpiper.

Report sales: £5.00 from Bill Staley, 16 Glengilp, Ardrishaig, Argyll PA30 8HT.

Ayrshire Bird Report 2001. Compiled by Angus Hogg, edited by Kevin Waite (SOC Ayrshire Branch).

This issue marks the report's silver anniversary and contains a variety of contributions in addition to a systematic list. In the opening article, Angus Hogg sings the praises of Turnberry Point. He advises seawatchers that if early-morning starts or F9 westerlies and sleet squalls are not their cup of tea, they may have to settle for second-best in seabirds. Turnberry is most profitable from mid-July into October when Manx Shearwaters occur in thousands and Balearic has become a regular visitor.

Details of the county's Kestrels, the transformation of a presumed female Smew into a full-blown male ("That Redhead's No Lady!"), a history of the report's 25 years, and a summary of ringing at Martnaham Loch precede the chronological summary and systematic list. A highlight early in the year was the county's biggest Waxwing invasion (500-600 birds). Spring was enlivened by Ring-billed Gull, Hobby and Black Redstart. A count of 7,000 Eiders in July was impressive, as were 11,000 Manx Shearwaters off Turnberry on 7th August. Two inland Little Auks were recorded in November, with a laggardly Wheatear on the 17th. The Snowy Egret added to its county tally by arriving in late December.

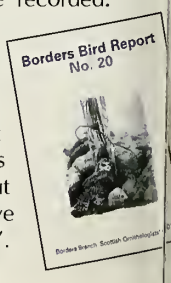
The species accounts are generally brief but comprehensive. High counts of some wildfowl, waders, terns, gulls and auks are tabulated. White Wagtail migration is also detailed (with a peak count of 45 at Barassie on 3rd May), as is the influx of Waxwings. The distribution and abundance of warblers is particularly well covered.

Report sales: £4.00 from Dick Vernon. Phone: 01292 442195 E-mail: vernon @hri.sari.ac.uk

Borders Bird Report No. 20. (2000). Edited by Ray Murray (SOC Borders Branch).

A major change to local recording has been the development of the *Borders Database*, a spreadsheet for the electronic submission of reports. The programme is free to anyone who wants it and doubtless the editor hopes that everyone will, as it makes the compilation of the report infinitely easier.

There were no additions to the Borders' list in 2000, but 210 species were recorded. The best birds were a Radde's Warbler at St Abb's Head, the second regional record, and the third Richard's Pipit (also at St Abb's). A pair of Ospreys again nested successfully, but the Red-necked Grebes "have just about given up the ghost".



A seasonal summary describes how waders benefited from the mild winter and Greenshank, Whimbrel and Green Sandpiper overwintered. A flock of Greenland Whitefronts, peaking at 58 in January, was a highlight. Spring migration was disappointing, with no unusual species until early June when a brief spell of southeasterlies brought in Red-backed Shrike, Common Rosefinch, three Marsh Harriers and a Corncrake.

Seabird 2000, the first national seabird census since 1982, was a major preoccupation in the summer. Most species at St Abb's Head (where numbers are monitored annually) had a reasonable year, with Shag being particularly productive. April floods hampered breeding wildfowl and there was no evidence of nesting by Wigeon or Goldeneye. Two pairs of Black-necked Grebes reared young. Increases in Grey Heron (to 100 nests), Black Grouse, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Water Rail and Barn Owl were considered to be a consequence of improved coverage rather than a genuine population rise. A real increase was Quail, with 20 calling birds and one brood found.

Early autumn was blighted by westerlies and few migrants. The winds were marginally more favourable in September, bringing Icterine, Barred and Yellow-browed Warblers. Apart from the Radde's Warbler, October was similarly subdued and it was left to November to try and salvage the situation with Pallas's Warbler and Richard's Pipit. The end of the year was as mild as its beginning, the conditions reflected in eight Blackcaps, five Chiffchaffs and a Black Redstart in December.

The Systematic List is about as detailed and informative as they come. The immense amount of information manages to remain uncluttered and accessible through sympathetic layout and the use of shaded tables and boxes for counts and site records. Wildfowl, raptors and waders are given particularly extensive coverage. Even some passerines seem to have had every individual counted, and not just the Nuthatches which increased to 55 territories at 34 sites.

The Borders Ringing Group had a successful year, ringing 2,647 birds of 60 species. Meadow Pipit (500) topped the list, with impressive totals for Common Sandpiper (58) and Dipper (162). Pink-footed Geese bearing Icelandic neck-collars demonstrated how some birds switch sites between and within winters, with individuals found in the Borders also being recorded in Aberdeenshire, Lancashire and Norfolk.

An article on bird crime by Sgt Malcolm Henderson lists mainly incidents of raptor persecution. The results of *Seabird 2000* are given by Ray Murray. The Gala Water Waterways Survey 1991-2000 and a *Countryside Survey 2000* bird count are described by Mark Holling.

The wealth of information and the quality of design and repro of this report are hard to beat. There is an abundance of black-and-white photos (mainly of birds, but with some coastal landscapes) and Derick Watson's illustrations enhance many of the pages.

Report sales: £6.00 from Malcolm Ross, The Tubs, Dingleton Road, Melrose.

Shetland Bird Report 2001. Edited by Mike Pennington (Shetland Bird Club).

This is one of the consistently outstanding local reports. It certainly benefits from a long and distinguished history and the islands' high concentration of resident and visiting birders. Given the amount of material and number of observations to be collated it is impressive how it manages to appear so quickly.

The seasonal summary describes the harsh winter with many birds moving out, a disappointing spring for migrants, a summer in which the breeding success of Arctic Skuas, Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns was virtually zero, an impressive autumn for vagrants, and a quiet year's end.

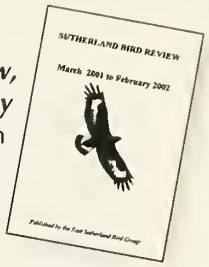
The Systematic List includes a seasonal breakdown of occurrences, breeding success, surveys and more. Predictably, there were some impressive sightings with White-tailed Eagle (a genuine Norwegian vagrant), Pallid Harrier (third county record), Semipalmated Sandpiper (only two previous records), Siberian Rubythroat (third British record) and Thick-billed Warbler (third British and fifth Western Palaearctic records), being the cream of the crop.

Other features include WeBS counts, weather statistics, early and late dates for summer migrants and descriptions of nine vagrants. Articles cover wintering Slavonian Grebes, status of the King Eider, breeding birds of Hermaness NNR, tree-nesting Ravens, and ringing recoveries. A complete county checklist (including Fair Isle) is provided, coming to 422 Category A-C species, of which Dennis Coutts has seen 383. The highest year list is Paul Harvey's 230 in 2001 and the highest garden lists are the 179 of Terry Rogers and Hugh Harrop. I wonder why the rest of us bother.

The colour photos are excellent - from crisp Ring-necked Duck to blurry Pallid Harrier and even the depressingly deceased Siberian Rubythroat. The repro of some of the black-and-white photos is disappointing but compensated for by many attractive vignettes. The report finishes with 14 pages of advertising, of everything from nature reserves to car hire. Not only are these useful for the visitor, but they presumably make a significant contribution towards production costs. The Shetland Bird Club has certainly got its annual report down to a fine art!

Report sales: £7.50 from Martin Heubeck, Sumburgh Lighthouse, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JN. Please make cheques payable to "Shetland Bird Club". E-mail: martin-heubeck@btinternet.com

Sutherland Bird Review, March 2001 to February 2002. Edited by Alan Vittery (East Sutherland Bird Group).



"The Review is intended to be complementary to the official regional bird report" and is a response to "delays in publication of the Highland Bird Report and the difficulty in extracting and analysing Sutherland data...".

Of course, no one has to justify producing a report of their own for any area, regardless of its size or species list. Everyone's chosen patch, be it garden, nature reserve, county or country, is important to them and potentially interesting to others. All it takes is enthusiasm and commitment to pull it together. The editor notes how this report also falls outwith the official national recording system, allowing him the freedom to give emphasis to his chosen species and, more unconventionally, to abandon the calendar year as the traditional recording unit.

The Review has no systematic list, but describes significant observations within each season. Arrival dates are given for summer migrants and the breeding season is covered in detail. Although it may have been "lovely weather for ducks", numbers of some wildfowl species were lower than usual. There were 17,000 Razorbills on Handa and Puffins began to recolonise after successful rat eradication on the main island. A Brambling with young at Ben More Lodge in late June was noteworthy.

The highlights of a disappointing autumn were Red-backed Shrike, Firecrest and Yellow-browed Warbler, plus major thrush movements in mid-October. An egret seen on 29th October was considered retrospectively to have been the Snowy which was later identified in Argyll as the first for Britain! Winter highlights were White-billed Diver, Kumlien's Gull, Rough-legged Buzzard and flocks of 1000+ Twite and 1,700 Brambling.

"Additions to the Sutherland list since 1997", "Significant sightings in 2001/02" and "First proven breeding of Mealy Redpolls on the Scottish mainland" merit their own articles. That there was only Chiffchaff recorded all year illustrates how different this area can be to the rest of Scotland. Nevertheless, this report brims with interest and is a fine example of committed regional birding. It is dedicated to the memories of Donald MacDonald and Dr Ian Pennie, who made outstanding contributions to local ornithology.

Contact: Alan Vittery, 164 West Clyne, Brora, Sutherland KW6 6NH.

Mike Fraser

From the Archives - The Isle of May, 1936 and '38

Pat Sandeman has very kindly donated to the Club archives a wonderful collection of photographs which show some of the outstanding characters from the early days of Scottish birdwatching.

Now in his ninetieth year, Pat is one of the great worthies of the SOC. He was a member of the group which nurtured and promoted birdwatching and bird conservation in Scotland and which ultimately led to the founding of the Club. The group included Pat's brother Gerry, Archie Bryson, Ian Munro, Frank Elder, Bruce Stenhouse, Hugh Simpson, Ian Stewart, Herbert Dacker, Mark Kerr and, of course, George Waterston (who was Pat's cousin). Many of these personalities appear in the photos.

Pat writes vividly of his early years birdwatching but, like many birders since, has a particular affection and enthusiasm for the Isle of May.

"...there are too many memories of the Isle of May, Fair isle, Rothiemurchus, Osprey watches, Snowy Owls", Pat recalls, "...but I remember arriving on the Isle of May pre-war and, as no birds were around, playing football near the South Ness. The east wind was blowing and there was a sudden arrival of lots of birds and on the football pitch, with others, there were six Red-spotted Bluethroats - marvelous to see! The same night, as rain and drizzle started, there were hundreds of migrants around the lighthouse seen in the rays and we were fair *forfochtin* catching and ringing them."

The Club is very grateful to Pat for the opportunity to publish these photographs and to share his memories.

Christmas Quiz Page

- something to keep you occupied while you are digesting your favourite bird or trying to decide how to discretely dispose of unwanted Christmas presents.

M	B	N	O	R	E	H	E	L	P	R	U	P	B	I
C	S	T	O	N	E	C	U	R	L	E	W	A	C	K
A	L	I	A	T	G	A	W	E	N	I	R	T	I	C
L	E	T	I	K	K	C	A	L	B	R	E	R	R	M
A	D	G	W	T	V	N	V	E	E	R	Y	I	S	B
N	B	Y	P	F	R	S	E	D	I	A	Q	V	P	L
D	E	B	Z	O	E	E	W	N	U	H	S	E	O	A
R	E	T	A	W	R	A	E	H	S	S	Y	R	O	C
A	E	X	N	F	R	W	S	S	O	U	W	W	N	K
L	A	H	N	B	A	B	T	P	W	G	T	A	B	S
A	T	Z	L	R	O	Z	H	Z	E	A	U	R	I	T
R	E	E	B	P	A	V	O	C	E	T	L	B	L	O
K	R	L	R	A	J	T	H	G	I	N	R	L	L	R
T	E	R	G	E	Y	W	O	N	S	O	U	E	O	K
R	G	Y	R	F	A	L	C	O	N	M	T	R	L	W

W	T	U	R	N	S	T	O	N	E	Z	L	D	K	J
G	N	I	L	B	M	A	R	B	S	K	A	T	W	S
L	I	A	T	N	I	P	W	F	O	S	U	D	Z	Q
J	P	S	L	X	F	A	S	V	O	J	X	C	L	K
E	K	I	R	H	S	Y	E	R	G	T	A	E	R	G
M	P	P	I	A	F	I	E	L	D	F	A	R	E	J
R	L	Z	Y	S	P	E	F	Z	E	P	O	F	S	A
Y	E	K	R	U	T	S	A	M	T	S	I	R	H	C
P	I	N	A	W	S	R	E	P	O	O	H	W	O	V
O	C	C	X	E	E	I	P	H	O	T	Y	B	R	C
T	S	S	L	D	G	X	S	G	F	N	E	D	E	W
N	X	T	W	E	P	I	N	S	K	C	A	J	L	N
G	N	I	T	N	U	B	W	O	N	S	Z	K	A	Z
B	N	K	U	A	E	L	T	T	I	L	B	I	R	S
G	N	I	W	X	A	W	M	F	P	V	T	D	K	Z

Bird Squares

For those of you who dipped out miserably on most of the year's vagrants, here is another chance to track them down. Unfortunately, your pager is on the blink (again) and all the messages are scrambled, so all you can see is a jumble of letters. Amongst this, however, 20 rarities are lurking, all of which turned up in Scotland this year. Their names are horizontal, vertical or diagonal and can run backwards or forwards. Like the birds, some are easier to find than others.

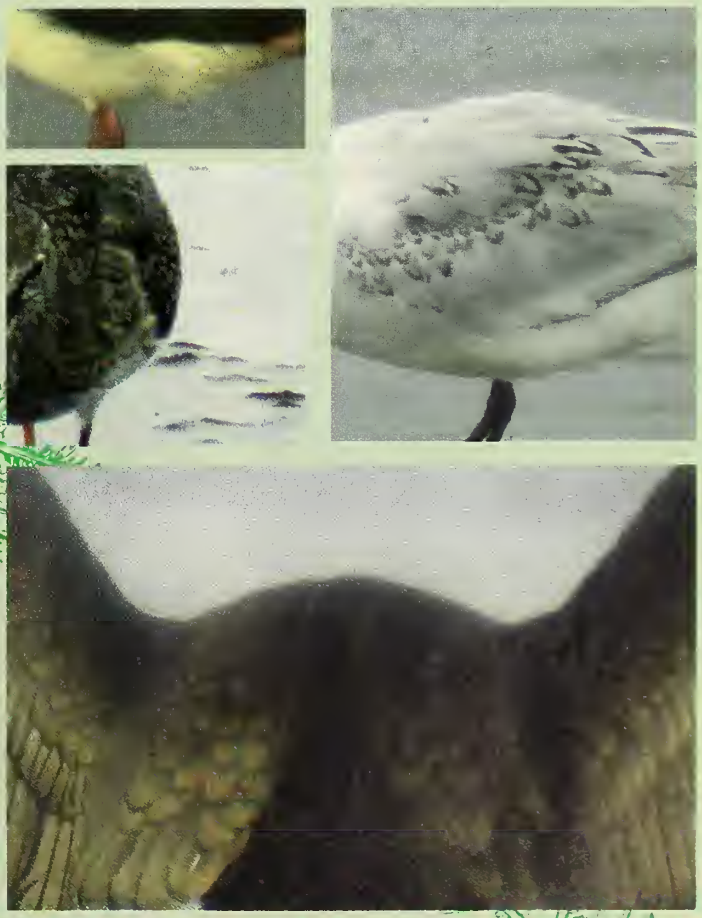
For those of you who like your birds (and your quizzes) a little less frustrating, here are 15 species which are exclusively or mainly winter visitors to Scotland. Their names are listed, with the exception of one hidden bird which is a particular favourite at this time of year. BRAMBLING, FIELDFARE, GREAT GREY SHRIKE, JACK SNIPE, LITTLE AUK, PINK-FOOTED GOOSE, PINTAIL, REDWING, SCAUP, SHORELARK, SNOW BUNTING, TURNSTONE, WAXWING, WHOOPER SWAN, plus one other.

The Names Game

The controversy surrounding the modernising of our bird names shows no sign of abating and will doubtless rage for as long as a Hedge Accentor has breath to sing. Name changes are nothing new, of course, and very few birds still rejoice in the name by which they were first christened. How many of these old and colloquial bird names can you recognise (or guess - many of the names reflect the appearance or behaviour of the species)?

1. **Bitter Bum**
2. **Bull Head**
3. **Coot-footed Tringa**
4. **Cuckoo's Messenger**
5. **Gnat Snap**
6. **Greenland Dove**
7. **Green-legged Horseman**
8. **Holland Hawk**
9. **Little Peewit**
10. **Night Raven**
11. **Rattlewings**
12. **Rolling Pin**
13. **St Cuthbert's Duck**
14. **Scribbling Lark**
15. **Sea Pheasant**
16. **Spratoon**
17. **Tangle Picker**
18. **Velvet Runner**
19. **Weasel Coot**
20. **Yarwhelp**

These names (all genuine!) are taken from *Bewick's British Birds* (1832) and *All the Birds of the Air* by Francesca Greenoak (1979, Andre Deutsch).



Mystery Birds

Your lenses have slipped, so these cropped shots are the best views you can get of these four birds. Can you still identify them?

The answers to the quizzes are on the next page. Good luck!

Answers to bird quiz

Puzzles compiled by Liz Fraser

Rarities square (Over, Down, Direction)
AVOCET (6,12,E), BARRED WARBLER (14,1,SW), BEE-EATER (2,6,S), BLACK KITE (10,4,W), BLACK STORK (15,5,S), CALANDRA LARK (1,2,S), CITRINE WAGTAIL (15,3,W), CORYS SHEARWATER (15,8,W), FEAS PETREL (5,6,SE), GYR FALCON (2,15,E), ICTERINE WARBLER (15,1,SW), MONTAGUS HARRIER (11,15,N), NIGHTJAR (11,13,W), PURPLE HERON (13,1,W), RIVER WARBLER (13,4,S), SNOWY EGRET (10,14,W), SPOONBILL (14,5,S), STONE CURLEW (2,2,E), TREE SWALLOW (5,5,SE), VEERY (8,5,E).

Winter Birds Square (Over, Down, Direction)
BRAMBLING (9,2,W), FIELDFARE (6,6,E), GREAT GREY SHRIKE (15,5,W), JACK SNIPE (13,12,W), LITTLE AUK (11,14,W), PINKFOOTED GOOSE (10,15,N), PINTAIL (7,3,W), REDWING (7,9,SW), SCAUP (2,11,NE), SHORELARK (14,7,S), SNOW BUNTING (11,13,W), TURNSTONE (2,1,E), WAXWING (7,15,W), WHOOPER SWAN (13,9,W), CHRISTMAS TURKEY (15,8,W).

The Names Game
1. Bittern, **2.** Grey Plover, **3.** Grey Phalarope, **4.** Wryneck, **5.** Knot, **6.** Black Guillemot, **7.** Greenshank, **8.** Great Northern Diver, **9.** Twite, **10.** Night Heron, **11.** Goldeneye, **12.** Red-necked Grebe, **13.** Eider, **14.** Yellowhammer, **15.** Pintail, **16.** Red-throated Diver, **17.** Turnstone, **18.** Water Rail, **19.** Smew, **20.** Bar-tailed Godwit

Mystery photographs *by Ian Andrews*
Lapwing, Redshank, Sandwich Tern and Cormorant

ARTICLE

Fair Isle: A Ranger's View

To say that you've visited Fair Isle is a treat; to say that you've worked at the Bird Observatory for the last six seasons is a privilege! I am lucky enough to be able to say that and, during my time on the island, I have filled various roles. I started off as a volunteer, a grant from the John Harrison Memorial Fund initially getting me there. This is a grant for young birdwatchers aged 15-21 which helps towards the cost of travel to Fair Isle. Using this I gained valuable work experience: it may have only been Heligoland trap repairs, planting trees and dealing with visitors, but it was the first step on the ladder. During those first few weeks a vacancy arose in the kitchen for a general assistant. I was lucky enough to get the job and spent a further six months on the island. So why would I want to work in the kitchen? Basically, at the age of 16, all experience counts and peeling tatties and serving up three meals a day is no trouble when you have all afternoon to go birdwatching! Gaining plenty of valuable experience also enabled me to fulfil my own personal dream and return as Assistant Warden. This year I was the Ranger employed by the National Trust for Scotland, which owns the island.

Many people might think that being the Ranger, or even the Warden, is a cushy job, but this is not the case. Granted, being paid for your hobby and birdwatching every day on a great birding spot is a bonus, but the amount of behind-the-scenes work is phenomenal. The work stretches from April to October (when the Observatory is open to visitors), nearly seven days a week and often long hours each day.

A typical day could see me taking guided walks, photocopying, leaflet folding, stile building and general visitor liaison. The warden, Deryk Shaw, and his assistants carry out the routine bird census as well as seabird monitoring. Census involves following a route through part of the island counting migrants - fantastic on a good day, but frustrating when the wind is in the west and it's raining! You only remember the good days, though, and there's nowhere better when the wind is in the east.

Seabird monitoring involves visiting a set seabird colony and watching the particular species through nest-building and egg-laying to fledging of the young. During the seabird season we are also heavily involved with entering seabird colonies (by rope or boat) and ringing chicks. This is an experience in itself - I can't describe how it feels to be among the sounds and smells of 500 Guillemots! Once the breeding season is over, there is the writing of the annual bird report and the seabird report.

Other tasks include general maintenance duties, filling diesel tanks and changing gas bottles, all essential to the running of the Observatory. At the time of writing (October) we are putting together reports for the season's work and preparing work-plans for next year. There may be fewer visitors in October but the work continues.

The job can also be very demanding, especially on the days where the hours are long and every visitor has a request in the same five minutes, but it is more than compensated for by the fact that you can live in a unique place and see a wealth of rare migrants! Sure, it's not everybody's cup of tea living on a remote island for six months with no TV, daily newspaper or (more importantly) pub, and your only contact with the outside world being a small Islander plane and the mail-boat, but it can't be knocked until it's been tried.

So what do we do in the winter? This is a commonly asked question, which is usually met with "We don't know"! All I know is, if I could do this job all year, no matter what demands are placed on me, then I would. But the seasonal staff leave the island at the end of October, with just the Warden and Administrator staying for the winter's work.

In my six years on Fair Isle I have seen no less than 16 Lanceolated Warblers, six Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers and seven Pechora Pipits. Not a bad list and there are plenty more! I also meet some terrific people, either visiting the isle or working there and it's these that help to make it memorable.

If you've not already visited Fair Isle, then please do so soon and you'll realise why I've spent such a long time here!

Alan Bull

Visit www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk *for details of the island, its birds, the Observatory and how to get there.*

Grasshopper (unfortunately not Pallas's!) Warbler, Fair Isle, Sept 2002. (Daniel Stenberg)

RECENT REPORTS

Autumn Review

After the first **Barred Warbler** on Unst in early Aug, those readers of the last Recent Reports who were left on tenterhooks in anticipation of the autumn ahead will be delighted to know that there was indeed a fantastic selection of rare birds during Aug-Oct. With over 90% of these on the Northern and Western Isles, however, most Scottish birders did not witness many of them. Indeed, 2002 will be remembered as a poor year by most rarity enthusiasts in Scotland but, rather than dwelling on what might have been, there were, of course, some highlights worthy of mention.

Lanceolated Warbler, Fair Isle, September 2002. (Hugh Harrop/Shetland Wildlife)

Shetland and Orkney (largely in the form of North Ronaldsay) both produced a succession of rarities during the autumn with almost no real standouts, although most of the "expected" turns these days were present. Two **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers** were in Shetland in Oct (on Foula on 6th and Unst on 14th); the four **Lanceolated Warblers** were predictably all on Fair Isle (on 7th Sept and 6th, 10th and 19th Oct). Four **Pechora Pipits** were also seen on Fair Isle, with two on 26th Sept, up to three the next day, one remaining to 28th and another on 5th-11th Oct. Another was at Kergord (Shetland) on 5th Oct. A juv **Pallid Harrier** came in off the sea at Sumburgh Head (Shetland) on 10th Sept and then, like last year's juv, roosted nightly at Brow Marsh until 13th. A **Red-flanked Bluetail** was at Helendale (Shetland) on 11th-14th Oct, a female **Black-throated Thrush** at Fleck (Shetland) on 17th Oct, and two **White's Thrushes** in Shetland in Sept (Fair Isle on 29th-30th [first there since 1973] and at North Collafirth on 30th). An adult **Isabelline Shrike** of the form *isabellinus* was on Fetlar (Shetland) on 14th-17th Sept and a male **Pied Wheatear** was seen on North Ronaldsay on 13th-19th Oct. An **Alpine Swift** on Fair Isle on 30th Sept was the first there since 1981. What was presumably the same

White's Thrush, Fair Isle, September 2002. (Hugh Harrop/Shetland Wildlife)

bird was reported on Foula the next day. Five **Olive-backed Pipits** were seen in Shetland between 11th and 16th Oct, with the only **Red-throated Pipit** of the autumn reported from Unst on 21st Oct.

Two **Dusky Warblers** were in Shetland in Oct and a **River Warbler** was on Fair Isle on 21st-25th Sept (ninth record for the island, the first since 1995). Three **Blyth's Reed Warblers** were reported, with two in Shetland on 15th-16th Oct and one on Barra (Outer Hebrides) on 24th-25th Sept (where the only **Arctic Warbler** of the autumn was seen on 23rd-26th Sept). At least seven first-winter **Citrine Wagtails** were in Shetland between 10th Aug and 23rd Sept.

An imm **Black-headed Bunting** was at Scalloway (Shetland) on 12th-18th Sept, with three **Yellow-breasted Buntings** in Shetland in Sept and a late one on Unst on 9th Oct. Perhaps the most controversial rarity of the period was the adult female **Chestnut Bunting** on Fair Isle on 4th-7th Sept. The doubters may ask if it was too early for an adult to be a genuine Siberian vagrant, whilst those in the "pro" camp can point to Finland's first record (a first-winter male) this autumn.

Although not as rare as the Chestnut Bunting, equally talked about was the adult female **Cirl Bunting** on North Ronaldsay from mid-Aug to 20th Oct. This represented only the second Orkney record and around the 13th for Scotland. North Ronaldsay also had arguably the best rarity, and the only North American passerine of the autumn, in the shape of a **Veery** on 30th Sept–6th Oct. This was only the second for Scotland after one on the Outer Hebrides in 1995. Also in a brilliant autumn on North Ronaldsay a **Sykes's Warbler** was trapped on 26th Aug. This recent split (it was formerly treated as a race of Booted Warbler) was identified by in-hand measurements. A further three *caligata* **Booted Warblers** were seen: at Sumburgh (Shetland) on 24th-25th Aug, North Ronaldsay on 9th-10th Sept and St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 13th Sept. Late Aug was a good period for rare *Hippolais*, with an adult **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** at Sandwick/Hoswick (Shetland) on 18th-25th and two **Melodious Warblers** in Shetland (Fair Isle on 14th and Sumburgh Head on 17th–18th). Also in Shetland in Aug a female **Subalpine Warbler** was at Maywick on 11th and at least one **Thrush Nightingale** was on Fair Isle on 20th-27th.

The event of August in the Northern Isles was an influx of **Two-barred Crossbills**, mirroring similar recent events in 1987 and 1990. Sixteen were seen, all in Orkney and Shetland up to 11th Sept and associated with an influx of **Common Crossbills**. There were also three reports of **Parrot Crossbill** in Aug from Orkney (2) and Barra.

What an incredible list of rare birds but, remarkably (and disappointingly) a **Rustic Bunting** at St Abbs Head (Borders) on 14th-16th Oct was one of only two passerine rarities seen on mainland Scotland this autumn. The other was a popular **Greenish Warbler** at Balcomie (Fife) on 12th-17th Aug. Four others were also seen in Aug (three in Shetland and one on the Isle of May on 9th Aug).

Of the scarce migrants, both **Wryneck** and **Barred Warbler** showed up well. Up to 40 **Wrynecks** were reported, most of which were associated with a fall in early Sept, whilst 45+ **Barred Warblers** were seen in Aug with 65+ in Sept (including up to 20 on Fair Isle). Seventeen were reported in Oct, with a late one on Fair Isle on 2nd Nov. Six **Pallas's Warblers** were seen between 11th and 24th Oct, with a great showing by **Firecrest** in that month with 18 seen from the 10th. Over fifty **Yellow-browed Warblers** were also seen in Oct, including eight on Fair Isle on 7th, although only 12 were seen in Sept from 22nd. A very late **Nightjar** spent the day on a garden fence at Inverbervie (Aberdeenshire) on 3rd Nov, and a **Hoopoe** was at Glen Feshie (Highland) on 13th-17th Oct

Shorelark, Girdleness, October 2002. (Harry Scott)

Only eight **Richard's Pipits** were reported, all from 10th Sept. Five **Shore Larks** were seen in Oct in Shetland and in Aberdeenshire. Two **Woodlarks** were in Shetland between 20th and 22nd Oct, but the only **Short-toed Lark** of the autumn was at Vidlin (Shetland) on 2nd Oct. Three **Nightingales** and two **Siberian Stonechats** were seen in Shetland in Sept and Oct. Five **Bluethroats** were reported between 10th Sept and 10th Oct, three or four **Marsh Warblers** in Aug and Sept, and eight **Icterine Warblers** in Aug and early Sept, including two in Angus and one in Fife. Up to 25 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were reported. In Aug and Sept 19 **Red-backed Shrikes** were noted, while there was an influx of **Great Grey Shrikes** in Oct with 16 seen between 10th and 16th. A **Black-bellied Dipper** was on Fair Isle from 23rd Oct, with one at Barns Ness on 3rd–4th Nov being only the second for Lothian.

Little Bunting, Cove, October 2002. (Harry Scott)

Up to 40 **Common Rosefinches** were seen, mostly in Sept and mostly in Shetland. Three **Arctic Redpolls** were in Shetland (amongst good numbers of **Mealy Redpolls**) in Oct between 17th-19th. Ten **Little Buntings** were reported in Sept and Oct, but only two **Ortolan Buntings** were seen (on Fair Isle in

Aug and on Benbecula, Outer Hebrides, on 10th Sept). There were very good numbers of **Lapland Buntings** around, especially in Sept with, e.g., up to 86 different birds on Fair Isle during the month.

Rose-coloured Starlings continued to turn up throughout the period with the first juveniles seen in Sept. The total number reported in Scotland between June and early Nov is around 105 birds. Out-of-range **Crested Tits** are always noteworthy, but a remarkable record concerns one visiting a peanut feeder in a Tobermory garden on Mull from 19th Oct. This is only the second record for Argyll.

Reports of the demise of last winter's **Snowy Egret** proved premature as it was found again in Aug in Tongland (Dumfries and Galloway). It was then in the WWT Caerlaverock area on 6th–17th Sept before being reported at Loch Ryan on 26th Sept. Also in Dumfries and Galloway, a fem/imm **Red-footed Falcon** was reported at Port Logan from at least 19th Sept. At least 11 **Common Cranes** were reported in the period in what has been a fantastic year for the species in Scotland, whilst a **Glossy Ibis** at South Nesting (Shetland) on 2nd-14th Oct, then nearby at Gott on 24th, was only the third record for Shetland and first since 1920.

Wildfowl reports largely involved the usual suspects, though up to 17 presumed vagrant small race **Canada Geese** were seen in Sept and Oct including up to 12 different individuals on Islay (Argyll) with the **Red-breasted Goose** returning amongst the Barnacle Geese there on 18th Oct. On the same day a **Ross's Goose** appeared amongst the Barnacle Geese at WWT Caerlaverock. The Central Scotland **Taiga Bean Goose** flock was at its highest ever level this autumn, continuing a welcome recent trend, with up to 232 present. A "new" **King Eider** was found with the discovery of an imm male at Loch Ryan (Dumfries and Galloway) on 3rd Oct, whilst a drake American race (*dresseri*) **Eider** was reported at Campbeltown Loch (Argyll) on 18th Oct. There are no accepted records of this race in the Western Palaearctic.

Whilst looking for migrants, one alert and lucky observer had the good fortune, to say the least, to see an adult **Black-browed Albatross** drift close inshore past Torness (Lothian) on 13th Oct. What was presumably the same bird was seen in Denmark a few days later. Other seawatching highlights included a presumed **Fea's Petrel** past North Ronaldsay on 21st Sept – the second reported from the island this year. A **Little Shearwater** passed Fife Ness on 9th Sept. Very large numbers of **Sooty Shearwaters** were in the North Sea in Sept and Oct with up to 4,000 reported in Sept and 1000+ in Oct. Record counts included 669 and 643 off the Isle of May on 22nd and 23rd Sept, respectively. Two **Great Shearwaters** were reported in The Minch from the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry on 24th Sept, and four Cory's Shearwaters were reported in Aug and Sept. There was a good showing by **Balearic Shearwater** with 40+ reported. In contrast, there was a very poor showing by **Leach's Petrel** with only 15 reported in Sept. Six **Grey Phalaropes** and 24 Sabine's **Gulls** were reported. Record numbers of **Little Gulls** were seen in the Forth in Oct including 427 off Kinghorn Harbour (Fife) on 27th and 400 off Seafield, Edinburgh on 28th. A second-winter **Laughing Gull** was reported passing St Abbs Head on 4th Oct whilst a juv **White-winged Black Tern** was at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 8th Oct. Three different **White-billed Divers** were seen in Shetland during the period, with an adult off Harris (Outer Hebrides) on 1st Nov.

It was not a vintage autumn for waders, with generally low numbers of **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Little Stint**. Two **Great Snipes** were reported in Sept (on Fair Isle on 22nd and Fife Ness on 10th), whilst in Oct an adult **Pacific Golden Plover** was again on South Uist at North Boisdale from 17th. Amongst North American waders only ten **Pectoral Sandpipers** were seen, with four **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** in Aug and Sept on Fair Isle, the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and in Fife. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** was on South Uist on 10th-11th Aug, **a Wilson's Phalarope** at Loch of Tankerness (Orkney) on 5th Sept, a juv **Baird's Sandpiper** briefly near Whinnyfold (Aberdeenshire) on 17th Sept, and an adult **Long-billed Dowitcher** in Aberdeenshire on 1st Sept with a juv in Sept on Foula (Shetland) on 21st-26th. Following an adult **American Golden Plover** reported at Birsay (Orkney) on 24th Sept, an influx of juvs occurred in late Oct with individuals in the Upper Forth, Ayrshire and Outer Hebrides. The rarest North American wader waited until the first week of November to put in an appearance with a

Stilt Sandpiper, Unst, November 2002. (Hugh Harrop/Shetland Wildlife)

first-winter **Stilt Sandpiper** at Norwick, Unst on 5th-7th, the latest ever in Britain, only the third for Scotland (and first since 1976), and the second for Shetland. This is a long overdue record of this smart American calidrid in Scotland, but after the autumn suffered by most of mainland Scotland the fact that it turned up on Unst seems almost unfair, but that's birdwatching!

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Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

Now, 66 years on, in 2002, the Club has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

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Passwords to access members' web pages: 'Snow' & 'Bunting'